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road; but as all the men were thoroughly tired this operation would be postponed till early next morning. Dupont was determined not to stay in Vang Vieng, but even he seemed to think twice about deliberately disobeying the convoy-commander's orders, and when he finally did so it was done in gentle stages, rather than in one flagrant act of insubordination. The excuse given for this phobia about Vang Vieng was that all the sleeping space would be taken up and we should find nowhere to stretch out comfortably.

We were still filthy from our travels; sweat-soaked and covered in bright yellow dust, through which the perspiration trickled down regular courses. As part of his campaign Dupont suggested that we should have a meal first and after that get permission from the convoy-commander to go for a bathe in a river, twelve kilometres down the road, where we should still be three kilometres short of the village with the Viet-Minh. Dupont described this river as if it had magical curative properties. It came out of a cave not far away, he said, and the water was icy cold. This course being agreed upon, we went to the usual Chinese eating-house run by one Sour Hak. Taken by surprise by our invasion, Sour Hak found himself short of food. However, as these villages are completely cut off during the six months' rainy season, there are always standbys for emergency. Reaching to the top of the cupboard he found a hunk of venison *boucané*, dusted it off and set it before us. This meat, prepared in a manner similar to that employed by the Argentine gauchos, was black, fine grained in texture as cheese, odourless and tasted slightly of liquorice. According to the usages of life in the bush, strips were cut off it with one's clasp knife. Fortunately, Sour Hak was found, quite mysteriously, to have a stock of first-rate Burgundy; doubtlessly bought in the belief that it was Algerian. Dupont's sudden optimism was only lowered by Sour Hak's refusal at any price to sell a green parakeet, which had flown in one day and attached itself to the house. Since tasting civilization nothing could persuade this bird to use its wings again, although like a true Laotian it enjoyed being taken for a ride on a bicycle. Dupont's